

Friendship Fire House
107 South Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia

HABS No. VA-463

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7-ALEX
79.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington 25, D. C.

Friendship Fire House
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Present Owner: Friendship Fire Company, Marshall Beverley, President

Present Occupant and Use: Fire Company

Description: Brick with pressed brick facade, elaborate moulded brick cornice, octagonal cupola, window heads and pedimented doorway, shed roof; Greek Revival style.

Number of stories: 2

Historical Data:

Year of erection: About 1830

Built for (first owner): Friendship Fire Co.

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Unknown

Notable events and occupants:

The Friendship Fire Company was organized in 1774 and this date is blazoned in two places on this structure. Its first engine house stood at the west end of Market Square and when a new market house was built along Royal St., the building was moved into Sharpshin Alley. In 1838 the Company consolidated with the Crescent Fire Company retaining the old name, but petitioned the Common Council of Alexandria to remove to the western part of town. By act of General Assembly dated February 28, 1866, the Friendship Fire Company of Alexandria was incorporated and continues today as an historical and social organization. It is maintained as a museum and exhibits an interesting collection of fire-fighting apparatus.

George Washington was an honorary member of the Company. In recent years the original hand pumper which he purchased in Philadelphia in 1775, has been returned to the custody of the groups. Another remarkable piece of equipment on display is the Prettyman hose wagon, manufactured in Alexandria.

References: Our Town: 1749-1865, Likenesses of This Place and Its People Taken from Life, Alexandria, Va., 1956, pp. 4-5.
HABI form, prepared by T. Russell Jones and Worth Bailey,
HABS, National Park Service.

Approved

Dick Sullivan
Chief Architect

Date

Feb. 16 1959

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
THE FRIENDSHIP VETERANS FIRE ENGINE COMPANY

Location: 107 South Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: The Friendship Fire Engine Company

Present Occupant: Owner

Present Use: Museum

Significance: This fire house was the home of the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Company, formed in 1774, This fire company had George Washington as a charter member. Washington donated the first fire engine for the company. The building was built in 1855.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Friendship Fire Company was traditionally founded by George Washington in 1774, and was presented its first fire engine in 1775. Washington had purchased the engine in Philadelphia at a cost of 80 pounds, ten shillings. This piece of equipment is still housed in the firehouse as a museum exhibit.

The two story brick structure, topped by its octagonal cupola, was built in 1855. This structure was preceeded by an 1839 structure on King Street between Columbus and Alfred, which cost \$150.00 and is described as being a large shed. This shed was moved to the site at 107 Alfred Street in 1851, where it stood until 1855 when it was destroyed by fire. A new firehouse was started soon after and the corner-stone was laid on July 22, 1855. In 1857 the firehouse bell was cast in Baltimore for \$300 by the firm of Register and Webb.

Through continued use and time the building fell into disrepair. This was corrected in 1952, when the citizens of Alexandria, led by Mayor Marshall Beverly, restored the firehouse to its original lustre.

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The Friendship Fire Company was founded on August 5, 1774, with George Washington as one of the founding members. This was followed in the next few years by several other Alexandria Companies: The Sun Fire Company in 1775; the Relief Fire Company in 1788; and the Star Fire Company in 1799. These others gradually faded away. Up until 1839 there was a Presiding Officer appointed for each meeting of the Friendship Fire Company, after that date a permanent president was elected. Charles Koones was the first president.

Throughout its history the Friendship Fire Company fought many important fires, including the 1855 fire in the U. S. Capitol which destroyed much of the Library of Congress. On the 17th of May in 1872 the Fire Chief of Alexandria ordered the company to stop fighting fires.

References:

Brockett, F.L. and Roch, G.W. CONCISE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA. 1883.

Powell, Mrs. Mary G. HISTORY OF ALEXANDRIA. 1926.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Friendship Firehouse is an 1855 two floor brick structure with an ornamental door, windows, and oversized cupola. The exterior of the rectangular building is 34' by 20', with the narrow side to the street. The street facade is the only ornamental one. The building is surrounded by small scale commercial and residential structures, and fronts on the sidewalk of the west side of South Alfred Street in Alexandria. In several places on the front of the structure there is the date, 1774, which refers to the date that the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Company was founded, and not the date of the building's construction.

The front of the Firehouse is flat red brick with exaggerated vertical emphasis to the second floor windows and the cupola. The first floor of the building has only a double door for the fire equipment. The doors are glazed with four square panes each over four wood panels. The doors are flanked by white wooden pilasters with a Corinthian hint to the capitals. These pilasters are surmounted by a simple triangular pediment. There is a row of six lights above the doors and below the pediment forming a transom. The second floor has a pair of four over six light double hung windows of exaggerated vertical proportion. These are topped by ornamental headers which are held up by curving, carved brackets and contain a row of dentals and moldings. The very top of this window assembly is a wooden piece of flamboyant silhouette also painted white. At the corners of each piece of glass on the front of the building, this includes the doors as well as the windows, there is a small piece of trim running at a 45 degree angle to the sash, just nipping off the corners, and giving the windows a lively and ornate pattern. The cornice of the rectangular facade is a deep, white, painted band which has a variety of decorative features. These decorative bands include such things as dentals, leaves, dots and eggs.

The cupola rests on the front of the roof of the firehouse. The first stage of the cupola is a simple wooden square topped by a dental and mold trimmed cornice. On the square section an octagonal or lantern portion begins. This section consists of bracketed columns with louvers between. These louver panels are rounded at the tops. This section is topped again by a bracketed cornice and a metal dome which is surmounted by a directional weather vane. The top of the vane is an iron fireman in fireman's coat and hat holding a torch and a water bucket.

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The north side of the firehouse faces a small alley and is very simple. There are a door to the rear of the building and some first and second floor six over six light double hung windows.

The interior of the firehouse is quite simple in plan. Both floors are one room with a small stairway and storage areas at the rear. The first floor opens directly onto the street through the double fire doors. The rear of the first floor contains a small modern toilet room and a storage area and the stair to the second floor. This stair is a simple and utilitarian one. The second floor has the stair in its rear and a small storage room, which has a hatch in the ceiling leading to a tiny attic, only over the stair, and then to the roof. This is the only access to the cupola.

There is little trim on the first floor, this having always been a utility area. The room at the time of investigation was set up as a fire museum and held some of the Friendship Fire Companies original fire fighting equipment as well as numerous relics and pictures pertaining to the Company's history.

The second floor is more ornate than the first floor. This floor has a wood floor, plaster walls and ceiling and has trim and chair-rail molding. At the front or street side of the room there are two side and one center platforms, raised up one step. The center platform has a stand on it and is flanked by wooden octagonal columns, which are hollow and allow the bell ropes to pass from the cupola to the fire equipment room below. This room is called the Washington Meeting Room.

The building is equipped with modern plumbing, heating and lighting of a minimal nature. The flat roof is covered with composition roofing. There is no sign at the present of any additions to the building or site characteristics that may have been removed.

Prepared by: Donald B. Myer
Architect
National Park Service
Washington, D. C.
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